PACIFIC STUDIES

Vol. 42, No. 3 December 2019

LAND GROUPS, LAND REGISTRATION, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS ON GUADALCANAL, SOLOMON ISLANDS

Tarcisius Kabutaulaka
Center for Pacific Islands Studies, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Neoliberal economic development requires that land boundaries and land groups be identified and registered, creating property rights and titles that can be bought, sold, and transferred. Registration makes land and land groups legible, thereby allowing states to exercise control and make land accessible to potential investors. This process of commodification creates changes that are often socially traumatic. In many Melanesian societies, individual and group rights to land are traditionally fluid and dynamic. Registration, however, freezes them. This paper examines how the process of land registration not only identify but also create land groups and influences how they respond to economic development projects. Two case studies on Guadalcanal illustrate this and highlight that land groups are not always passive victims. However, their agency can only be exercised within the limits established by the state. This paper locates Guadalcanal's experiences within broader discussions of land and economic development in Oceania.

Introduction

This paper examines how customary land groups respond to large-scale economic development projects. It discusses the intersections and entanglements between customary land tenure systems and capitalist economic development. Here, landscapes and land groups become the geographical and social spaces where customary rights, state interests and laws, and corporate desires intersect and influence one another. These intersections influence the

nature and dynamics of contemporary land groups and economic development outcomes. The paper discusses how land groups respond to capitalism's need for property rights, which underlies the state's push for land reforms aimed at registering titles. This push for the creation of property rights is what I refer to here as the "disciplining of development spaces." The paper examines the state's role in facilitating changes in land tenure, how land groups respond to these changes, why they respond in particular ways, and how their responses influence the nature and dynamics of the land groups and economic development outcomes. The paper uses two national development projects in Central Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, as case studies: the Gold Ridge mine and the proposed Tina River Hydropower Development Project (TRHDP).

While the case studies are on Guadalcanal, the paper highlights broader issues that are pertinent to other Pacific Island countries and territories. Central to this is how neoliberal economic policies have led to and influenced the nature of land reforms aimed at making land accessible for economic development projects. These reforms were largely about registering land, which transforms it from customary systems of tenure to a codified system that gives rights to individuals, groups (e.g., land groups), corporate entities, or the state. In addition, the push for land registration has a long history that precedes the advent of neoliberal economic policies from the 1970s and onward. It was informed broadly by ideas of capitalist economic development and the institutions that were established to facilitate it. Since the mid-1800s, there has been a push by private business interests and various colonial administrations for land registration. The underlying rationale was that customary systems of tenure were not conducive to a capitalist market economy that focuses on using land to generate and accumulate financial capital. Examples of major land registration projects in Oceania include the Great Māhele in Hawai'i from 1945 to 1955 (Kame'eleihiwa 1992; Osorio 2002), the land surveys and registration in Fiji from 1880 to 1940 (Rokolekutu 2017; Kurer 2005; France 1969), and the creation of individual land ownership in American Sāmoa (Kruse 2018). Throughout the colonial and postcolonial eras, many Pacific Island countries have introduced land registration laws. This broader regional context will be discussed below.

In discussing the case of Guadalcanal, this paper first proposes that while customary land groups on the island have always been dynamic, large-scale economic development projects have influenced them to mutate more rapidly and in particular ways. As groups compete to be recognized by the state, they could potentially create new groups, strengthen some groups' claims to land, weaken others, and erase some claims. This could (and has in some cases) engender conflicts, intensify economic inequalities, and in the long term potentially create landlessness. Second, the paper discusses how the state—often in partnership with corporate entities—uses its legal apparatus to influence, if not

dictate, how land groups are defined, organized, and deployed for purposes of economic development. Here, land groups are organized to fit the state's legal requirements and be compatible with the requirements of capitalist economic development. The process leads to the commodification of land, as well as land groups. Third, the paper asserts that customary land groups have agency, rather than simply being victims of the state, corporate investors, and development partners. They often use—either intentionally or unintentionally—their fluidity and mutability to engage with one another and other stakeholders. This agency does not always give them better economic outcomes, but it is a useful bargaining tool, because it causes discomfort to the state, corporate entities, and development partners. However, land groups' agency is exercised within the limits established by the state through its laws, processes, and officials. Consequently, landowner agency is framed by the state.

The paper is divided into five parts. First, it provides a broad Pacific Island overview of land, land reforms, and economic development. This outlines the discourses and policies that underlie the push for customary land reform and discusses how such reforms influence landscapes and social groups in order to make them compatible with the needs of capitalist development. Second, the paper focuses on Solomon Islands. It provides an outline of the state's rationale for land reform and the laws and processes that have been established to facilitate it. Third, it provides an overview of customary land tenure systems in Guadalcanal. Fourth, it tells the stories of the Gold Ridge and TRHDP development projects and discusses how land groups responded to them. Fifth, it provides concluding remarks.

Customary Land and Economic Development in Oceania

Land is central to economic development. Consequently, discussions about land and economic development often focus on the need to access land and have security of tenure, especially for the state and potential investors. In these discussions, customary systems of tenure are sometimes viewed as impediments to economic development (Hughes 2003; Gosarevski, Hughes, and Windybank 2004; Chand and Duncan 2013). These views about customary land and economic development have been expressed by politicians, ordinary citizens, academics, and development partners in Oceania and elsewhere in the world. They are based on the premise that customary systems of tenure create "undisciplined development spaces," because they are generally communal, dynamic, fluid, and uncodified—and therefore outside the purview of the state. This, it is argued, does not provide secured property rights to land. This is particularly the case for neoliberal economists, who view land primarily as "just another factor of production, with the peculiarity that it is relatively inelastic in

supply" (Chand and Duncan 2013, 34). In discussing land and property rights in Oceania, Chand and Duncan expressed concern that

> the absence of individual rights to [the] use of land creates uncertainties with respect to investment, particularly investments that have long gestation periods before providing returns.… Insecurity of access to land could reduce private investment in infrastructure, which in turn is likely to retard the rate of long-run economic growth. (34)

Consequently, reforms to customary systems of land tenure are viewed as a precondition to economic development, because they would provide secure property rights, especially for potential investors, and reduce land-related disputes. As Helen Hughes argues, while commenting on the communal nature of customary land tenure systems,

> Changing from communal to individual property rights undoubtedly has costs for some individuals. Some will benefit more than others. But experience worldwide shows that where the transition from communal to personal property rights takes place in an open society, the benefits to the lowest income households that emerge from the process are far greater than those of standing still. (2003: 11)

Underlying the push for customary land reform is the idea and process of neoliberal capitalist economic development. Here, the term "neoliberal capitalism" is used to refer to policies that promote free market economic orthodoxy where land is viewed as a means of production—it is important primarily for the production of commodities for export and to generate profit that is viewed as central to measurements of economic development. Pacific Island places and societies have been drawn into this since the late 1800s, when most became intertwined in global trade, resulting in the acquisition of land for the development of (coconut, sugar cane, pineapple, oil palm, etc.) plantations and later mines. This has resulted in the registration and acquisition of large areas of land in Fiji and Hawai'i in particular. From the 1980s onward, Pacific Island countries have been pressured to adopt neoliberal economic policies as promoted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. This influenced their policies toward the access and use of land (Slatter 2004).

Neoliberal capitalist development needs "organized development spaces" that would enable capitalism to function effectively. These spaces are both geographical (landscapes or seascapes) and social (socialscapes) that are identified and organized to make them legible to the state, investors, and other economic development agencies (Scott 1998). Consequently, land reform usually focuses

on land registration, which is ultimately about identifying land boundaries and matching them to land groups or owners. Such legibility is fundamental to and a precondition for the implementation of state plans. Building on Scott's notion of legibility, Dan Jorgensen states that "legibility enables systematic state intervention in the affairs of its citizens, and creating legibility entails state simplifications of social practices in the form of a standard grid whereby these can be recorded and monitored" (2007: 57). The process of disciplining development spaces to make them legible is also about simplifying complex systems and relationships that exist largely outside of the purview of the state. This simplification enables the state to appropriate lands and land groups.

This is vital to the establishment of clearly defined and secured property rights that are enforceable by laws and can provide greater security of tenure. This is important because property rights are fundamental to capitalist economic development. They are what Craig Richardson refers to as the "invisible foundation" that supports "three distinct economic pillars … creating a largely hidden structure for the entire marketplace: (i) trust; (ii) land equity; and, (iii) incentives" (2006, 4). This, it is envisaged, would encourage potential investors to commit capital, make long-term plans, and ultimately create economic growth. But the process is not only about the creation of property rights and hence the commodification of land. It is also about commodifying land groups so that they can be easily bought and sold by the state and corporate entities while giving them the façade of being owners of property. Once land groups are identified and registered, they could then be passed from one investor to another, similar to the way properties (including land and the resources on it) are traded.

Underlying this discussion and process of disciplining development spaces and making them legible is the assumption that customary systems of tenure are static. In other words, there are clearly defined land boundaries and land groups that exist in the kastom (custom) domain and need only to be recorded, registered, and transferred into the formal legal system, or the state domain. But that is not necessarily the case. Customary land tenure systems are not unchanging since time immemorial, as is sometimes implied in academic and popular discussions. They are dynamic, flexible, and malleable. Consequently, what is regarded as a customary land tenure system today is not necessarily the same system that it was twenty or even ten years ago. It has changed over time in response to new technologies, population decline and growth, greater mobility, literacy, the establishment of centralized government, different approaches to development, etc. As Ron Crocombe notes,

> What is called customary or traditional tenure in the Pacific today is a diverse mixture of varying degree of colonial law, policy and practice, with varying elements of customary practices as they were in the late

> nineteenth century, after many significant changes had been wrought on the pre-contact tenures by steel tools, guns (which facilitated large-scale warfare), population decline, labor recruiting (which increased mobility) and absentee right right-holding, cash cropping and alienation in the post-contact but pre-colonial era. (1983: 3–4)

In his study of the contemporary butubutu in New Georgia in the western Solomon Islands, Edvard Hviding provides a detailed discussion of their flexibility and fluidity and of the mutually constitutive relationships between a group and its territory (1993; 1996, 136; 2003). The state plays an important role in transforming customary systems of tenure. For example, in writing about Ranogga in Solomon Islands, Debra McDougall states, "Although they are not fully integrated into the state legal system, local tenure practices have nevertheless been profoundly reshaped through generations of engagement with the state, and many local people have internalized the assumptions of successive government actors about the nature of customary tenure" (2016: 38).

In the customary systems of tenure, ownership, access, use, and disposal rights to land intersect, overlap, and influence one another in complex ways that reflect relationships between people. These land tenure systems are ultimately about social relationships and how they are mapped onto landscapes. The complexities of customary land tenure systems reflect the complexities of people's relationships and responsibilities to one another. It is fundamentally about rights and responsibilities to land, as well as to and between individuals and groups. In writing about Marovo in the western Solomon Islands, for example, Hviding describes butubutu as a "diverse set of groups and categories of people related through some source of 'sameness' and commonality, be it descent, filiation, or residence" (1996: 136).

The dynamism and mutability of land groups differ from one place to another, or at a certain period compared to others, depending on internal group dynamics, as well as responses to outside forces and factors such as population growth or decline, migrations, and settlements and resettlements. The nature of these groups is also influenced by how society organizes its members around the complex intersections and overlaps among the different rights to land—ownership, access, use, and disposal—and the responsibilities associated with them. So the terms "tribe" and "clan" are often used loosely for any group that forms and claims rights to land. Writing about land tenure systems on Isabel, in Solomon Islands, Colin Allan alludes that, "The definition of tribe is necessarily a loose one" (1957: 52).

Consequently, to identify a tribe and clan as the landowning unit can be misleading, because it does not reflect the flexibility and dynamism of the social units that claim rights to land, the complex relationships between groups, and how those relationships influence rights to land. While tribes and clans are often

identified as landowning units, communities involved in large-scale development sometimes form and reorganize groups in response to such development and in order to meet the requirements of the state, especially to identify and register land in ways that will meet state definitions of a landowning unit, or to become legible to the state. As stated above, land groups are relatively fluid, flexible, and accommodative. For example, in response to large-scale development projects, communities in a project site may create smaller land groups, subclans, or extended family units. This is perhaps done to maximize the group's potential benefits from the project: a smaller group could ensure greater benefits for each member. However, it could be that these groups have always existed and rights to land were vested in these smaller groups, rather than larger units that are referred to as tribes. Maybe these smaller groups were invoked because they were viewed as the best response to large-scale development projects and in anticipation of potential benefits.

In customary land tenure systems, access to land is typically fluid, depending on relationships (such as intermarriages, adoptions, and kinship ties), reciprocities, needs and the prospects of building alliances for the future. While a land group might, at a particular time, have the right of ownership to a piece of land, others could have user rights, accessing land to cultivate food, harvest fruit trees, collect building material, hunt and forage, etc. Eugene Ogan (1971) illustrates this fluidity and accommodative tenure system in his discussion of Nasioi land tenure in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea. Similarly, Allan (1957) discusses how customary land tenure on Isabel in Solomon Islands provided for the accommodation of people, even those captured in war, thus ensuring that people were not landless, or at least that they had the right of access and use to land they might not necessarily own. As Jim Fingleton notes, customary land tenure systems are dynamic, flexible, and complex, allowing for different kinds "of rights and obligations at individual, family, clan and tribal levels" (2004: ix). Alex Golub (2007a) discusses how the fluidity of Ipili land groups allowed them to forge new forms of sociality in response to modern laws and state regulated land registrations to facilitate the development of the Porgera gold mine. The relative flexibility of land groups in the customary systems provide social safety nets in ensuring people have access to land for subsistence, even if they do not have ownership rights. There are, in other words, various layers of rights that allow at least a subsistence livelihood (Fingleton 2005).

The dynamism of the customary land tenure system is also reflected in the changing roles of members of the land group. For example, over time, the roles of women *vis-à-vis* land have changed, mostly marginal compared to those of men (Stege et al. 2008; Monson 2011). Rebecca Monson (2011) discusses the marginalization of women in villages close to Honiara in Solomon Islands. In other places, such as the Cook Islands, women have become more visible in land dealings (Crocombe 1983). Many Pacific Islanders also live in the diaspora but

continue to claim rights to land back home. In some places, these absentee landowners influence decisions about land in the islands, as Crocombe discusses in the case of the Cook Islands.

But proponents of neoliberal capitalist economic development see these customary arrangements, or the kastom domain, as disorganized and undisciplined. They therefore see the need to organize and discipline these arrangements in ways that make them compatible with the needs of capitalism, which is often the same as the needs of the state. This is often done through the establishment of laws and institutions that facilitate geographical and social mapping—the identification and registration of land boundaries and landowners and the introduction of registration systems, such as the Torrens system, that make them indefeasible. Here, the needs of capitalist economic development are mapped onto landscapes and socialscapes.

This neoliberal capitalist push for land reform often ignores the important social role of customary land tenure and that economic development could occur (and has occurred) on customary land. It therefore provides a socioeconomic safety net, especially in societies where a large percentage of the population live in rural areas and are more dependent on land for sustenance. Ward (2013) and Fingleton (2004, 2005) argue that instead of dismissing customary tenure as a problem, practical suggestions should be made on how to adapt customary tenures to the new demands on land. They also warn of the need to be cognizant that registration could lead to alienation and therefore produce a landless population. Iati (2016) argues that the Torrens system of land registration that could potentially lead to land alienation in Sāmoa, especially through long-term leasehold arrangements.

In Oceania, major capitalist economic development projects started in the 1800s. Central to this was a push for the identification of landowners and land boundaries, which led to the registration of land in some parts of the region. In some places in Oceania, the changes to land tenure systems have been more rapid and permanent than in others. Two places where there have been extensive land registrations are Hawai‘i and Fiji. In Hawai‘i, the Great Māhele of 1845–55 saw the conversion from customary land tenure systems to registered freehold titles that could be transferred through fee simple arrangement. This has resulted in unfavorable outcomes for most native Hawaiians and has made land central to past and contemporary discussions on politics, culture, and economics in Hawai‘i (Chinen 1958; Banner 2005; Van Dyke 2008). This has, arguably, led to the alienation of land and displacement of many indigenous Hawaiians, thereby creating a landless population (Kame‘eleihiwa 1992; Osorio 2002).

In Fiji, the land survey and registration took longer, from 1880 to the 1940s. This led to the codification of land rights and the establishment of state institutions such as the Native Land Trust Board (now called the iTaukei Land

Trust Board) that assumed the power to manage native land—determine lease arrangements, rental prices, and how land rents were shared. Here, the *mataqali* (extended family unit) was recognized and registered as the landowning entity. The act of identifying, recording, and registering the mataqali as the land group was not a simple process of recognizing a landowning unit that existed traditionally. Rather, it was also a process of creating land groups in order to create property rights that were necessary for the development of the sugarcane industry. Consequently, it was a process that created neatly organized Fijian social entities that might not necessarily reflect precolonial Fiji (Rokolekutu 2017; Durutalo 1985, 1986). Rokolekutu (2017) provides a detailed discussion of the history and politics that underlie land registration in Fiji and the impacts, especially on indigenous Fijians. It was an example of the disciplining of development space to make land available for sugarcane plantations that were vital for financing the British colonial administration. Consequently, Fiji's development space was disciplined through the processes of surveys, the identification and registration of mataqali and *veitorogi vanua* (land boundaries), and the establishment of the *vola ni kawa bula* (the registry of indigenous Fijians). It was a process of mapping landscapes and socialscapes. Despite the disciplining of development spaces and the registration of land, land-related issues have become central to Fiji's politics, both prior to and after independence (France 1969; Kurer 2005; Rokolekutu 2017).

In the other Melanesian countries of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu, land registration has been slower and in some cases was overtly resisted. This is why customary land makes up a majority of the land area in these three countries. However, successive governments in these countries, often with the backing of development partners and the tacit (and sometimes overt) support of corporate entities, have pushed for land reforms. At the core of the land reform agenda is land identification and registration, or mechanisms for leasing land (Larmour 1986, 2002). This, it is envisaged, would reduce land-related disputes and make land more accessible to potential investors who were seen as important to economic development. Consequently, Papua New Guinea enacted the Land Registration Act (Cap. 191), Solomon Islands enacted the Customary Land Records Act (Cap. 132), and Vanuatu has a Land Leases Act (Cap. 163). In the next section, the paper focuses on Solomon Islands.

The State and Customary Land in Solomon Islands

The issues raised above are reflected in discussions about land and economic development in Solomon Islands. For example, while speaking to a workshop on land reform in August 2015, the then–Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare (2015) referred to land as a "hurdle to development." He states that the

country is "decades behind in addressing this single most important hurdle to development." He went on to say that in order for Solomon Islands to compete in international trade and grow its economy, it must "make land available for development and whether such a program can be undertaken without the need to alienate land from our people. That itself is a major achievement if we can find a solution" (2015, 2). There are two issues that underlie Sogavare's statement. The first is the view that customary systems of land tenure are incompatible with capitalist economic development. Consequently, when he referred to land as a "hurdle to development," he wasn't talking about land per se. Rather, he was referring to customary systems of land tenure, of managing ownership, access, and use of land, that were viewed as hurdles and therefore needed to be changed. Second, it was important to establish legal and institutional mechanisms for accessing and using customary land for economic development without alienating indigenous Solomon Islanders, or customary landowners. It raises questions about how this could be done and about the role of the state in making and imposing regulations on something that exists largely in the kastom domain.

Sogavare's successor, Rick Houenipwela, expressed similar sentiments. In addressing the Provincial Premiers' Meeting in Auki, Malaita Province, in November 2017, Houenipwela stated,

> Availing land for the Government to use continues to be a major setback. Land disputes have always been the major stumbling block to the commencement and progress of any infrastructure development in Solomon Islands. As such, a priority policy for the SIDCCG [Solomon Islands Democratic Coalition for Change Government] is land reform. The SIDCC Government is embarking on a land reform policy that will enable Customary Land owners to free up their resources for the allocation of these projects such roads, bridges, economic growth centres to name a few.

Houenipwela's statement focused specifically on the need to access land for public purposes, such as infrastructure development, and the need for reforms that would free up land, making it accessible to the state for the development of public infrastructure. This underlines that customary land is inaccessible to the state and there is often resistance to development, even for building schools, health centers, roads, etc., that would benefit communities, including landowners. Although the state has the power to compulsorily acquire land for public purposes (eminent domain), this power is usually used dispassionately and is subject to negotiations.

In Solomon Islands, the state has established processes to identify land groups—tribes or clans—and boundaries. These are provided for through

three pieces of legislation that give the state the authority to determine, record, register, and keep the records of landowners and land boundaries: the Land and Titles Act (Cap. 133), the Customary Land Records Act (Cap. 132), and the Forest Resources and Timber Utilisation Act (Cap. 40). The state therefore appropriates, frames, and influences kastom and inserts itself into the kastom domain. To legitimize the process, the state deploys and engages kastom in the land identification process. For example, chiefs are involved, and kastom forms of evidence are accepted as proof of claims to land. Here, kastom functions within the state's legal frames. This is what Foukona and Timmer (2016: 119) refer to as strategies that not only illustrate "the state's inroads into people's lifeworlds but also illuminate that the state expresses itself in the form of a blending of 'the law' with two other prominent normative systems in Solomon Islands: Christianity and kastom." For this paper, the focus is the state's role in framing the definition and exercise of kastom in land identification processes.

The land identification processes include the following: (1) an officer of the state is authorized by the relevant provisions of the law to administer the land identification process; (2) he or she identifies a parcel of land and the purported landowners, or customary land groups apply to have their land recorded and/or registered; (3) the state publishes notices and invites competing claimants; (4) it holds public hearings for the claimants; (5) the officer determines the rightful owners of the land; and (6) the land recorder records the outcomes of the public hearing. There is a provision for an appeal by those aggrieved by the determination of the state official, and this should be done within three months from the date of the determination and record (Land and Titles Act, Part V, 66).

There are several issues related to this process. First, the power to determine the rightful owners of the customary land is vested in the state, as represented by officials such as the acquisition officer (Land and Titles Act, Part V) and land recorder (Customary Land Records Act), or through a hearing process that includes chiefs or community leaders, in the case of timber rights hearings (Forest Resources and Timber Utilisation Act). Therefore, the state not only facilitates the process of land determination but also assumes the power to determine ownership of customary land. Second, this is a social and geographical mapping process that ultimately creates properties and property owners that could be easily identified by the state and potential investors. Third, the process alienates land in a three ways: (1) alienation of information when customary land groups give up (or give away) information about land that used to be kept in the kastom domain and controlled by land groups to the state through the recording process; (2) alienation of use, such as the use or harvesting of trees as provided for by timber rights hearings and subsequent agreements; and (3) alienation of titles through the registration process, giving the state the authority to record and keep titles. Fourth, the process of land identification forces people to create groups, merge,

server relationships, forge new ones, and define and redefine relationships in ways that they might not have otherwise done. Consequently, the process not only identifies groups but also could create groups as people align and realign or break into smaller groups in ways that they think would best serve their interests. Therefore, the state not only identifies land groups that exist but also could create them. But there is also agency on the part of land groups as they decide which groups to form, which ones to sever relationships with, and which ones to align with. These decisions are made based on how they think they could best benefit from the groups. But land groups' agency can only be exercised within the regulations established by the state—the state, in other words, frames and regulates the ways in which land groups exercise agency.

Such mutability of land groups, especially in response to large-scale economic development, is neither new nor unique to Solomon Islands. Similar development has been seen elsewhere, especially in neighboring Papua New Guinea (Jorgensen 2007; Golub 2007b; Stead 2016). Therefore, the state process not only looks for and identifies land groups but also creates them—at least by influencing how individuals and groups align, form, and reform.

So how does this disciplining of development spaces manifest on land and economic development in Guadalcanal? The next section focuses on land tenure systems in Guadalcanal, providing the context for understanding how large-scale development projects such as Gold Ridge and Tina hydroelectricity have affected it or were affected by it.

Customary Land Tenure Systems on Guadalcanal

Guadalcanal is one of the nine provinces in Solomon Islands. It is the largest island of the Solomon Islands archipelago, with a land area of 2,060 square miles (5,302 km^2). It hosts the national capital, Honiara, and a number of current and proposed national development projects that are (or could become) vital to the country's economy. These projects require access and security of tenure to land. They include Guadalcanal Plains Palm Oil Ltd., the Gold Ridge mine, the proposed TRHDP, and the proposed Mamara-Tasivarongo tourism development. It also hosts cocoa and coconut plantations, other agricultural development, and numerous logging operations, all of which contribute to the national economy. These require land and have influenced changes to land tenure systems on the island, especially in the north, northwest, northeast, and central parts of the island, where most of these development projects are located. Customary land tenure systems have also influenced the nature and dynamics of these development projects.

As in the rest of the country, a large percentage (about 92%) of land on Guadalcanal is customary land. Titles to these lands are vested in groups, which

are made up of people who claim a common ancestry. The groups are often referred to as clans or tribes in academic and popular discourses. However, here I use the pijin (Solomon Islands pidgin) term laen, which is derived from the English word "line" or "lineage" and refers to a group of people who claim the same line, lineage, or ancestry. This avoids the use of the terms "clans" and "tribes" as though they are universally applicable or describe social organizations and groups everywhere. It is acknowledged, however, that popular discourses about land in Solomon Islands tend to use the terms laen, "tribes," and "clans" interchangeably to refer to land groups. In these discussions, the definitions of what constitutes a tribe or a clan are ambiguous. The state, however, often writes tribes and clans into policies and statutes as though they are clearly defined entities. The state's identification of clans and tribes as landowning entities is often not an identification of what exists but rather what the state desires or requires in order for the state (and along with it, capital) to be able to have clearly legible entities to govern (Scott 1998). As discussed above, state processes could potentially create tribes by requiring land groups to take particular forms.

In order to claim a common ancestry or the same laen and therefore belongingness to particular places, stories about origins; migrations; taboo sites; peo (worship sites); hunuvale/vunuvale/vanuaravu/vulinikomu/luvunavera (old residential sites); and moru/karuba/alisapuru/hatuba (old garden sites) are important. Paul Tovua, a senior Guadalcanal man and respected elder, refers to "tabu ples, bolo tabu mana golona en sam ples say who na malahai hem usim … en peo" (taboo places or sites, taboo pig, shell money, and in some places they ask, who was the warrior who used these … and the sacrificial altar) (pers. interview, August 16, 2016). They provide proof of one's membership to a laen and claim of belonging to a place (or places) and therefore rights to land. Stories are powerful; they map people's relationships to one another and to places, and they determine their rights to land. But there are usually multiple and competing stories. Consequently, those who control, own, or tell the dominant stories, or could make their stories become dominant, usually become powerful. People therefore guard their stories about land, unleashing them only when they need to. This creates social and geographical arenas where stories are told, performed, verified, contested, and retold in attempts to claim ownership of land and the resources on it.

With regards to land, origin stories and those of migration and settlements are vital. In Guadalcanal, there is no single origin story throughout the island. However, there are similarities in the various stories about how the different laen originated and the way in which lineages are passed down. Except for the Areʻare speakers of Marau Sound on the eastern tip of the island, the rest of Guadalcanal has an exogamous matrilineal system of descent (1). The number of laen and the names for the groups and subgroups vary slightly across the

island. One story says that all laen on Guadalcanal started from two laen that could be traced to the original female ancestors and what was initially a moiety system of lineage. These two laen were Manukiki and Manukama. Murray Bathgate recounts an origin story that was told to Ian Hogbin by the people of Tetekanji bush, which states,

> Guadalcanal was built out of the sea by two men, and when they had finished they planted two trees. An eagle laid eggs in one of the trees from which came a man and a woman who created the Manukama line. Simultaneously, leaves from the other tree fell to the ground to metamorphose into a man and a woman who established the Manukiki line. Subsequently, Sivotohu, a sky spirit, gave them pigs and all other living things. (1993: 176–77)

This story shows an origin from a moiety to a four-line (or more) unilateral system of descent. This is not unusual. Anthropologists have observed similar development elsewhere.

On Guadalcanal, the word for laen differs in the different languages. In the Lengo language, it is referred to as a kema, while the sublines are called mamata. In the Ndi-Nggai language of West Guadalcanal, the main line is called a duli, which translates to "group" in English. The sublines are called puku (bottom). They are also called pinau. In the Malango language, the lines are called lilivu, while in the Tolo, Birao, and Moli languages, they are referred to by various terms, such as alo, vunguvungu, and puku.

The number of lines and names differ across the island, although there are similarities in the names. Woodford (1890, 41) lists four lines (Haubata, Kiki, Lokwili, and Kindipale), while Rivers (1914: 243–44) identifies six kema (Haubata, Kiki, Lokwili, Kindipale, Kakau, and Simbo), and Hogbin (1938) lists four (Haubata, Lokwili, Kindipale, and Kakau). In discussing West Guadalcanal, Bathgate (1993, 176) identified seven laen: Manukiki, Kakau, Haubata, Lokwili, Kiki, Kindipale, and Simbo. In his work on Longu Kaoka, Hogbin (1961, 4) identifies "five matrilineal dispersed clans": Hambata, Lasi, Naokama, Thimbo, and Thonggo. In Tasimboko, there are five laen (Nekama, Ghaobata, Lathi, Thimbo, and Thongo). In the Tolo, Moli, Birao, Poleo, and Malango language areas, there are two main laen, Qaravu (Manukama) and Manukiki, as well as two smaller laen, Lasi and Koenihao.

Bathgate attests that "the confusion appears to arise from over-reliance on informants and, more particularly, on the part of the later separation of the lineages present from those which are the most dominant and own land" (1993: 177). But this might not necessarily be a result of confusion. Rather, it is because there are differences across the island (Table 1).

According to Tovua, "iumi lo bigining tu nomo ia. E ruka soba puku … a Manukiki mana Manukama … den bihaen kam na hem split into four. Fofala ia na mekem enikaen vunguvungu" (for us, in the beginning, there were only two. Only two sublines … Manukiki and Manukama … then later on it split into four. Those four then split into many different lines) (pers. interview, August 16, 2016) (2).

The two laen have often been described in the everyday pijin parlance as big laen (big line) for Manukama and smol laen (small line) for Manukiki. It is not clear when the reference to these lineages as big and small started. It is perhaps a reference to the names, which literally translate to "big bird" (manukama) and "small bird" (manukiki). The totems for the two laen are eagle and hawk, respectively. The regular reference to two main laen implies that Guadalcanal has a moiety system, but it is more complicated and dynamic.

The laen are fundamental to Guadalcanal societies. They regulate relationships such as marriage, adoption, political and economic alliances, and rights to land. They also connect people from different parts of the island. The importance of these relationships is illustrated by the rule that one cannot marry within the same laen. To do so is to commit incest: chio, as it is called in the Tolo, Birao, Moli, Poleo, Gharia, Qeri, and Ndi-Qae languages, or sio, as it is called in the Lengo language. That is one of the most serious offences in Guadalcanal societies, which in the past was punishable by death, or the offenders would be cheka or seka (ostracized or exiled) from their lineage, land, home, and community. Now, pigs would be killed in the place of the offenders, and shell money would be given to mend relationships.

As stated above, most of Guadalcanal has a matrilineal system of lineage. Rights to land are therefore inherited through the maternal line. In discussions about land tenure in matrilineal societies, there is a tendency to portray women as the owners of land. For example, it is common for people to say oketa woman na onam lan (women own land). Such statements often confuse matrilineal

Table 1. **Lineages in Guadalcanal Languages.**

Lengo	Ndi-Qae, Nginia, Gharia, and Qeri	Birao, Tolo, and Moli	Poleo	Malango
Nekama	Lakwili	Qaravu	Lakuili/ Qaravu	Manukama
Thimbo	Kakau	Manukiki	Manukiki/ Kakau	Manukiki
Ghaobata	Haubata	Koenihao	Haubata	Koenihao
Lathi	Simbo	Lasi		Lasi
Thongo	Kindipale			

with matriarchal. Just because a society has a matrilineal system of descent does not necessarily mean that it is a matriarchal society. In other words, a system of descent and inheritance does not necessarily mean political power or ownership of land. While the two are interrelated and overlap, they are not the same. Women are the means through which rights to land are transferred because they are mothers to the next generation and hence responsible for the continuity of the laen. Without women, the laen dies. They play an important role as progenitor of the next generation of landowners and hence the lifeline of the laen. However, the roles and powers to make decisions about land were traditionally shared between male and female members of the laen. Although men are often the spokespeople, women contribute to and may even dictate the agendas and outcomes of discussions. Weta Ben, a senior Guadalcanal man, states that "sista en brata tufala holem ikul raets lo lan, eksep taem iu kam lo onasip. Oketa pikinini blo sista ia na onasip hem folom oketa" (sisters and brothers hold equal rights to land, except when it comes to ownership. The ownership follows the children of the sister) (pers. interview, September 28, 2016). He goes on to state that children of the maternal line cannot discriminate against their paternal cousins, because they also have the rights to access and use of the land.

However, the nature and dynamics of women's role vis-à-vis land and economic development have changed over time. Generally, woman have become marginalized and disempowered in discussions about, and therefore control of, land. This is partly because of the role of the state. Monson observes that state laws have "operated to the detriment of many landowners, particularly women, who often lack the formal education or customary authority required to speak in public arenas" (2011: 5). In writing about Kakabona, a periurban community west of Honiara, Monson discusses how development projects and state laws could, and have in some instances, marginalize and disempower women from decision-making processes about the use of land and the benefits accrued from development projects. Stella Kokopu, a nurse and woman leader from Tiaro on Guadalcanal, states that while titles to land are transferred through the female line,

> in the case of Guadalcanal at the present and past times, decisions have been made by men. It is true they are members of the tribe, but they are custodians of land that belongs to women because women are the owners of land. We should be the decision makers too. Men should simply convey the decisions we make … they [men] are simply spokesmen. (pers. interview, November 23, 2016)

She continues to state that women should be involved in decisions about economic development initiatives on Guadalcanal, especially with logging.

Maetala (2008) made similar observations about the marginalization of women in matrilineal societies on Guadalcanal, Makira, and Isabel.

In terms of inheritance, one knows one's laen because it is inherited from one's mother. Furthermore, generally one cannot switch laen—you are born into a laen and become a lifelong member. For example, one cannot be born Manukiki and later in life switch to become Manukama. So at that level, the laen is clearly defined and unchanging. However, in some circumstances, one could be adopted into a laen, where the adopted child would assume the adopting mother's laen. In the contemporary era, the traditional system of lineage is often disrupted when Guadalcanal men marry into patrilineal societies in other parts of the country. The children from these marriages cannot inherit their father's laen on Guadalcanal or their mother's laen in the patrilineal societies they come from. They could however be adopted into their paternal grandfather's laen by presenting chupu to the grandfather's line. This gives them access and use rights to land.

An important function of the laen is that membership determines access to land rights. But the laen as outlined above might not necessarily be the land group, or the landowning entity. The land groups are often smaller units, or subgroups of the laen. For example, in the Tasimboko area of North Guadalcanal (Lengo language), while the kema is the larger group, land rights are vested in smaller groups known as mamata. Similarly, on West Guadalcanal, the bigger group or line is the duli or puku, but land rights are vested largely in smaller entities. Tovua describes these smaller entities as vunguvungu (fruits) that grows out of the puku (bottom).

As will be demonstrated in the cases of Gold Ridge and the TRHDP, rights to land in Central Guadalcanal are also vested in smaller groups or sublines that have mutated from the main laen. For example, within Manukiki in parts of Tasimauri, there are smaller groups such as qaresere, lupalupa, and raunikolo that hold rights to land. These smaller groups emerge as a result of migrations, internal conflicts, someone being cheka/seka for having committed a crime like chio, etc., where groups find areas of land, clear them, establish their peo and bolo taboo (sacred pig), dedicate ghado/qolo tabu (a sacred shell money) to the land, and therefore claim rights to it. These groups also mutate in response to large-scale national economic development projects such as mining and hydropower. At this sub-laen level, the groups are dynamic and fluid; they mutate and are not as rigidly organized as is sometimes implied or as the state wants them to be. This fluidity, dynamism, and mutability allow them to adapt to different situations. This is not unique to Guadalcanal, or Solomon Islands. Anthropologists like Stead (2016), Golub (2007a, 2007b), and Jorgensen (2007) have made similar observations in neighboring Papua New Guinea.

The next section discusses what happens in the face of large-scale development projects, focusing on the experiences of the Gold Ridge mine and the

proposed TRHDP. It examines the state's role in framing land groups and how land groups respond to state and corporate demands, as well as competing and complementing demands within land groups.

Gold Ridge Mine

The Gold Ridge mine is located in Central Guadalcanal. It was the first large-scale mining operation in Solomon Islands, but has been closed since 2014. There are, however, plans to reopen it (Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation [SIBC] News 2018). In October 2019, a ceremony was held at the mine site to officially mark its reopening. The holding company, Gold Ridge Mining Limited (GRML), is now jointly-owned by local landowners through the Gold Ridge Community Investment Ltd. (GRCIL) (10%), Chinese-owned and Australian-based property developer AXF Group (13%), and Hong Kong-listed Wanguo International Mining (77%). GRML will in turn contract Chinese state-owned enterprise, China Railway, at a total cost of US$825 million to operate the mine. At the time of writing, the only active mining operation in the country was the bauxite mine in West Rennell in the RenBell Province. But there are numerous prospecting operations around the country, and alluvial mining in Gold Ridge has a long history that continues today. The proposed operations include the mining of nickel on Isabel Province and bauxite in Wagina, Choiseul Province.

Two land-related lessons could be drawn from the Gold Ridge experience. First, it illustrates the fluidity of land groups and how state-sponsored processes to identify land groups could lead to the proliferation of land groups and engender intra- and intergroup disputes as groups compete for access to the expected benefits from mining. This makes the task of land identification difficult and expensive, both monetarily and socially. Second, it illustrates that this process can influence how land groups form and mutate.

Interests in mineral resources in Solomon Islands, especially Guadalcanal, can be traced to the 1930s, when S. F. Kajewski, a botanist from the University of Queensland, discovered economically viable quantities of gold on Guadalcanal (Moore 2013; Nanau 2014). But industrial mining started in the 1990s when the Australian company Ross Mining established a subsidiary known as Ross Mining (Solomon Islands) Ltd., which began operations in 1998. However, it closed operations in 2000 as a result of violent conflicts that began on Guadalcana in late 1998 (Evans 2010). During the 22 months that the mine was in active operation, the total gold production amounted to approximately 210,000 ounces and contributed 30 percent of the country's gross domestic product (Nanau 2009). In 2010, the mine was sold to Gold Ridge Mining Ltd., a subsidiary of Australian Solomons Gold, which is in turn a wholly owned subsidiary of Allied Gold Ltd. In 2012, Allied Gold sold the mine to St. Barbara, another Australian company,

which operated the mine until 2014, when it closed following flash floods that devastated parts of Solomon in April that year. In May 2014, St. Barbara transferred ownership of the mine, via a sale at a nominal amount, to a local landowning company, Gold Ridge Community Investments Ltd. (GRCIL). In early 2018, the Ministry of Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification (MMERE) reportedly told the Solomon Islands National Parliament that the mine was expected to resume operations by the end of 2018 or early 2019 (SIBC News 2018). As stated above, at the time of writing, GRCIL had partnered with AXF Group and Wanguo International Mining to reopen the mine.

Under the current arrangements, as provided for by the Mines and Minerals Act, the state facilitates land identification, recording, and registration processes. This process of social and geographical mapping is also supposed to be regulated by the state. However, prospective investors often approach land groups prior to being authorized by the director of mines, as required by the law. This means that they could potentially influence the process, sometimes causing conflicts between and within land groups and between land groups and the state. This is because mining negotiations take place even before proper land group and land boundary identifications take place. The new National Minerals Policy, as proposed by the MMERE, recognizes this. It states that

> The current practice of companies leading the landowner identification process has raised a number of significant problems. Allegations of companies paying inducements to landowners and "cherry picking" landowners sympathetic to their cause are an issue. Likewise, registration of land at the prospecting phase has often been premature leading to false hopes but, more significantly, interfering in the ability of landowners to make informed decision about potential mining activities. (Solomon Islands Government [SIG] 2016, 26)

Following the land identification, the land is leased by the government, through the Commissioner of Lands, and then subleased to the investor. The perpetual estate (PE) title remains with the customary land groups.

The Gold Ridge Mine Agreement was signed by the company, the SIG, and 16 land groups, referred to in the agreement as tribes. These land groups are (1) Rausere, (2) Charana, (3) Kaokao, (4) Roha, (5) Sutahuri, (6) Vatuviti, (7) Halisia, (8) Soroboilo, (9) Chacha, (10) Sabaha, (11) Salasivo, (12) Chavuchavu, (13) Kaipalipali, (14) Koenihao, (15) Lasi, and (16) Sarahi (GRML and GRCLA 1996: 14–15). They all belong to only four laen: Manukiki and Manukama/Qaravu, which are the two main laen or lilivu (in the Malango language), and Lasi and Koenihao, the two smaller laen or lilivu (Figs. 1 and 2). However, in the land identification, negotiation, and signing of the agreement, Manukiki

and Manukama/Qaravu were not identified as the landowning units. Instead, sub-laen were identified as the land groups. As illustrated in Figures 1 and 2, many sub-laen are related to one another through a common lineage. But when it comes to dealing with large-scale development projects such as mining, they choose to identify as separate land groups.

The mining lease has been bought and sold by three Australian companies since the late 1990s. But the landowning groups have remained the same since they were identified and registered. The agreement between them and the investor (the company) simply transfers from one investor to the other. In a way, the identification and registration of land groups have turned them into a commodity that could be bought and sold by investors. This is what I referred to above as the commodification of land groups.

Gold Ridge consists of different land parcels. To illustrate the dynamics of the land identification process and its impact, I look at two of these land parcels: Koku and Bubulake. The Koku land parcel in Gold Ridge was initially registered under three land groups that belong to the Manukama laen: (1) Sabaha, (2) Sarahi, and (3) Salasivo. However, by July 1995—prior to operation of the mine—the Sabaha land group decided to break away from the other two. The minutes of a meeting by Sabaha representatives held on July 25, 1995, states, "It was discussed and agreed that Sabaha Tribe to isolate themselves from the above two tribes." The reasons were that (1) they were never included as signatories to bank accounts, (2) they never received royalty payments, and (3) they were represented by a non-Sabaha individual (SIG 1995). In addition, the appropriation and use of the term "tribe" identified the group as separate from the others, although all of them belong to Manukama. "Tribe" is the term the state uses to refer to the landowning groups. Sabaha's identification as a separate tribe was

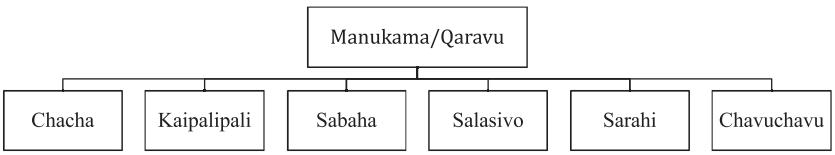

Figure 1. **Manukama Land Groups.**

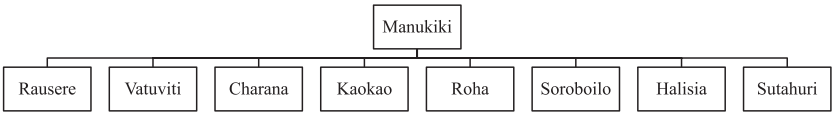

Figure 2. **Manukiki Land Groups.**

both a reaction to what had happened and an attempt to gain recognition from the state by adopting and deploying the state's language of social identification. The reasons for the separation were the distribution of royalty payments and representation, which illustrate the role of capital in self-identification of land groups. Large-scale development projects and the injection of capital contribute to the making of tribes, or at least influence social identifications.

The Bubulake land parcel was identified as a potential site for the relocation of those displaced from the mining area. The land identification process started in December 1991, following mining interests by Arimco NL (now Australian Resources and Mining Co. NL) and Cyprus Gold Australia Corp. In March 1997, the Kolobisi tribe was registered as the landowning group and represented by five trustees: Solomon Tiva, Primo Lungu, Samson Maneka, John Bosaponoa, and Primo Amusaea. In a note (undated), the land acquisition officer states, "During the course of the meeting Mr. Solomon Tiva presented to me the Local Court decisions over Bubulake Land and upon receiving them I was satisfied that Bubulake Land must belong to Solomon Tiva and group." However, John Tueke (Soroboilo tribe) and Chief Tango (Chacha tribe) challenged Kolobisi's claim of ownership and the land acquisition officer's decision during public hearings on November 18 and 30, 1994. So they appealed to the magistrates court, which heard the case and handed down its decision on May 9, 1996, ruling to uphold the land acquisition officer's decision that the Kolobisi tribe was the rightful land group (Land Appeal Case No. 1/95). This illustrates the power that state officials have in not only facilitating land determination processes but also determining land groups.

There were also divisions within the Kolobisi tribe. For example, Tiva, one of the trustees, wrote a letter to Amusaea, another trustee member, trying to exclude him as a trustee and therefore access to the benefits from land rental and other payments. Tiva wrote, "Due to the fact that you belong to another tribe, as opposed to my tribe I hereby suspend the agreement to share rights over Bubulake land" (letter dated July 26, 1996). The letter was copied to the MMERE, and the project coordinator subsequently interjected, stating that the "exclusion of any member of the above trustees would only take place if a formal letter sign by the four (4) trustees informing this office of the changes in trustee we then can change our records. Otherwise this should have been sorted out in the first place during the public hearing, that is if Primo Amusae was of a different tribe, and not to be included in the trustee" (letter dated August 19, 1996). Amusaea defended his right to be a trustee for the landowners, pointing to the state process as legitimizing his claims:

> To my understanding I have a right on the share in the proposed tailing site. If you still insist in position to put me out, I assure you that the Bubulake land will face some problems. I understand that we have

> already held discussions at Pitukoli Village during the first hearing held by the Land Acquisition Officer, Mr Mason Nesa dated 05/12/96 and we have made an understanding before we elected the trustees of Bubulake land. (letter dated August 14, 1996)

These cases illustrate three things. The first is the role of the state in determining and legitimating landowners through its processes, officers, laws, and institutions. So the state plays an important role in determining landowners and tribes. Second, the fluidity of the land groups is illustrated by the continuing changes of the groups, with memberships being negotiated even during and after the land identification process. However, after land has been registered and is within the purview of the state, that fluidity ceases. Consequently, those who challenge the determination after it has been completed have no legal recourse. Some have therefore opted for illegal means of challenging the outcomes. This has often resulted in conflicts that have sometimes resulted in violence. Third, the registration of land groups has turned them into clearly defined commodities that could be sold by one investor to another. Hence, commodification occurs of not only land but land groups as well.

Proposed TRHDP

The TRHDP is a proposed hydropower project in Central Guadalcanal that is in the development phase. There are three lessons to learn from the TRHDP. Like Gold Ridge, it illustrates the dynamic nature of land groups and how the process of land identification is not only a process of identifying land groups but also a process that forces land groups to form and mutate to meet the requirements of the state. Second, it shows agency on the part of land groups, especially how they purposefully mutate in the hope of maximizing benefits from the state and investors. Third, it illustrates the power of the state in influencing how land groups form and in its ability to exclude through compulsory acquisition.

The TRHDP is a multidonor collaborative effort involving the World Bank as the lead agency supporting the project preparation, the International Finance Corporation as transaction adviser to the SIG, and several agencies supporting preparation: the Pacific Region Infrastructure Facility, the Australian Government, and the European Investment Bank. These agencies, along with the Asian Development Bank and the Government of New Zealand, are considering continued support through provision of funding for various activities during the implementation phase. The TRHDP will consist of two components: (1) a hydropower facility with an installed capacity of 20 MW to be developed and operated by an independent power producer under a thirty-three–year concession that would sell power to the Solomon Islands Electricity Authority

(SIEA)—now trading as Solomon Power—under a long-term power purchase agreement, and (2) technical assistance to the SIG to monitor and support project implementation. The project was coordinated by the MMERE and the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Survey (MLHS).

Central to this project is land. Land for the core area of the project was compulsorily acquired, using the powers vested in the government as provided for by Part V, Division 2, of the Land and Titles Act. This gives the minister responsible for lands the power to compulsorily acquire land for public purpose and outlines the process for doing it. According to this process, any person with an interest in the land had the right to challenge the minister's declaration on the basis that the purpose for which the land was acquired was not a public purpose. There is also provision for compensation coordinated by the permanent secretary to the MLHS. These processes could happen concurrently with the land identification and registration. The process for the compulsory acquisition of the TRHDP started in August 2014. A letter notifying the land groups about the compulsory acquisition stated that "The acquisition provides the Commissioner of Lands with the rights to use and occupy the land on behalf of the Government. It removes customary rights of ownership or usage on the land and changes those right into the right to receive payment for their value." It went on to inform them, "Should you wish to make a claim for the value of any customary interest you may have in the land this must be done in writing to my office on or before 21 November 2014" (letter from the Commissioner of Lands, October 2, 2014).

As part of this process, the SIG—through the MMERE and the MLHS—signed a process agreement with the core land groups. Under this agreement, it acknowledged ownership, consent to acquisition of core land, consideration, valuation of guarantee, and revenue sharing. The completion of the process of compulsory acquisition of the core land was contingent to prior informed consent of land groups (Commissioner of Lands, October 2, 2014).

When the land identification process started in 2008, twenty-seven groups (3) claimed to be landowners or were listed by the state as landowners of the project area. According to Tovua, who is also a Tina landowner and member of the Garo Buhu group, many of the groups split into smaller groups because "they don't want to be left out if you have the bigger [group] … iu lukim Sarahi and Salasivo, wan nomo ia … ivin if iu lukim Kochiabolo en Bulahe, wan nomo oketa ia" (you see, Sarahi and Salasivo, they are one … even if you see Kochiabolo and Bulahe, they are one) (pers. interview, August 16, 2016). Despite this, the state legitimized them as land groups by giving them goodwill payments. In 2011, the SIG, through the Tina Hydropower Development Project Office, paid each of the twenty-seven groups SI$100,000 (US$11,860), which totaled SI$2.7 million (US$320,226). This payment was for the access agreement, which gave the project office access for 18 months to carry out social and

environment impact assessments and other studies to determine the viability of the project. The then–minister of mines explained it as a "goodwill payment," which "confirms and implements NCRA's [the National Coalition for Reform and Advancement government] policy to ensure maximum benefits accrue from the sustainable management of natural resources" (TRHDP 2017).

The land identification process was done by chiefs through the Bahomea House of Chiefs and supported by the government and project office. The Bahomea Land Identification Committee was subsequently established and worked with the Bahomea House of Chiefs and the MLHS to identify land groups, especially in the core lands. The land identification process resulted in four tribes being identified as core land tribes, which included the amalgamation of many of the twenty-seven groups that initially claimed ownership. The four core land tribes were Roha (Manukiki), Garo Buhu (Manukiki), Kochiabolo (Manukama), and Vuraligi (Manukama) (SIG process agreement, July 17, 2014). As part of the agreement, the SIG agreed to pay each tribe a minimum value of SI$12,000 (US$1,423) per hectare for their acquired land. The agreement states, "This is a minimum payment and will not affect the Core Land Tribe's entitlement to the full amount of any compensation awarded under the Lands and Titles Act." During the signing, the SIG paid, "each Core Land Tribe a consent fee of SI$75,000 [US$8,895] and each signatory (up to a maximum of 7 for each tribe, of which at least two will be women) a signing fee of SI$5,000 [US$593]." The two smaller groups at the margins of this agreement that land in the area, but not within the core area, were Lasi (Uluna Sutahuri) and Kaokao.

One of the main issues of contention in TRHDP was the value of compensation for the core land that was compulsorily acquired. The commissioner of lands carried out the negotiations with land groups, using the process provided for by the Land and Titles Act. The value of compensation determined by a SIG-selected land valuer was set at SI$22 million (US$2.6 million). The government offered to pay SI$70 million (US$8.3 million). The total amount of compensation offered by the commissioner of lands to two of the two core land groups was SI$37,564 (US$4,553) per hectare for Kochiabolo and SI$40,780 (US$4,753) per hectare for Garo Buhu. This exceeded the minimum compensation rate agreed to by the land groups in the process agreement. The compensation offered to the two land groups has been transferred to a trust account to be paid to their cooperative societies once established (SIG 2017).

However, some members in the Garo Buhu and Kochiabolo land groups disagreed with the value of compensation awarded, stating that the two land valuers they had contracted put the value of the land at SI$205 million (US$24.3 million). The land groups claimed that they were willing to settle for SI$145 million (US$17.1 million). As a result of the disagreements over the value of compensation, the chairman of the Kochiabolo land group, George Vari, threatened that

his land group will "pull out of the project" (Namosuaia 2015). Tovua also said that his land group, Garo Buhu, refused to sign, because the members think the compensation was insufficient (pers. interview, August 16, 2016). By 2016, two of the land groups had accepted the compensation offered to them by the SIG: Roha received SI$6.9 million (US$818,340), while Uluna Sutahuri accepted SI$1.2 million (US$142,320). Uluna Sutahuri was not a core land tribe. At the time of writing, negotiations were continuing with the remaining land groups. In September 2019, Garo Buhu had received half of the payment that was due to them, while Kochiabolo received the full amount.

The other substantial issue in the TRHDP is the mechanism for benefit sharing. The TRHDP was established on the principle of build-own-operate-transfer. Consequently, it is jointly built, owned, and operated by an investor or developer, the SIG, and land groups, with the objective of eventually returning it to the SIG and land groups. This is reflected in the arrangements on land, as well as the proposed equity share in the project. In terms of land, after compulsory acquisition, the commissioner of lands holds the PE title on behalf of the SIG.

The commissioner of lands will eventually transfer the PE title to a core company, which will be owned jointly by the SIG (50%) and the landowners cooperative (50%). The core company will lease the land to the project company, which will be responsible for operating the hydropower dam plant. The project company will be owned jointly by the investor or developer (51%), which will be responsible for the design and construction work and for managing the repayment of the loan, and the core company (49%) (SIG 2017). After thirty years, the developer will relinquish its 51% share to the core company. The SIG and landowners will therefore become the sole owners of the plant, which will sell wholesale electricity to the SIEA.

When this paper was written, work on the project was continuing with commitment from the SIG and development partners. In June 2017, for example, under a three-year Solomon Islands–Australia Aid Partnership, the Australian government announced that it had committed AU$17 million (US$11.6 million) for the TRHDP (*Solomon Star,* June 30, 2017). In September 2019, the World Bank reported that a series of agreements had been signed to move forward with the TRHDP. The commercial agreements were signed in Sydney and

> included the on-lending Agreement between Tina River Hydropower project company and [the] Solomon Islands Ministry of Finance & Treasury, as well as agreements related to the funding support from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), who yesterday confirmed a commitment of US$30m to the project. The ADB now joins the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development (ADFD), the Australian Government (DFAT), Green Climate Fund and the Korea-EX-IM Economic Development Cooperation Fund, all

of whom, alongside World Bank Group, have all committed to supporting this key nation-building project in Solomon Islands (World Bank 2019).

Despite these commitments, land continues to be an issue of contention, especially disagreements on the value of compensation for the land that was compulsorily acquired.

Conclusions

This paper highlights how land registration and economic development projects influenced land groups on Guadalcanal in Solomon Islands. It also highlights broader issues that are relevant to land-based economic development and land issues in the Pacific Islands and other places where a large percentage of land is regulated by customary systems of tenure. It discusses how land registration, by identifying and codifying land boundaries and land groups, disciplines landscapes and socialscapes.

Using two case studies on Guadalcanal in Solomon Islands, the paper demonstrates how customary land registration has transformed land groups from fluid and dynamic entities to standardized and static groups. Terms such as "tribes" and "clans" are deployed, not necessarily to describe what exists but to define social entities and facilitate standardization and the recording of land groups and land boundaries. This is necessary to make land groups and landscapes legible to the state and development partners and to create property rights, which are fundamental to capitalist economic development. The creation of property rights requires the identification, appropriation, and commodification of both land and land groups so that they can be bought, sold, and transferred from one investor to another. This could privilege ownership rights and undermine, if not erase, land group members' access and use rights to land. It could subsequently create landlessness, which could in turn engender conflicts. Furthermore, the process of land registration produces disputes as groups and individuals fight over ownership rights because of what they perceive as the potential economic benefits at stake. Such disputes could in turn undermine economic development projects. This is illustrated in the two case studies discussed in this paper.

The paper also shows that land groups have agency in these interactions—they are not just passive victims. The two case studies illustrate how land groups form and reform in attempts to maximize benefit from the development projects. The degree of their success varies across time and place. Furthermore, not all members of land groups are affected by and benefit from economic development projects or have agency in the same way. Women and youths, for example, continue to be in the margins of decision-making about land and economic development, although they are often affected the most. More importantly, the paper shows

that land groups' agency is exercised within the limits established by the state. As demonstrated in the case of Solomon Islands, state laws regulate how land groups are defined and identified and the processes through which they prove ownership or belonging to particular landscapes. Land groups could refuse to participate in that process. However, as the case of the TRHDP on Guadalcanal demonstrates, the state possesses the power of compulsory acquisition in the name of a common good. This will ultimately force land groups to participate.

The role of the state as the discipliner of geographical and social spaces is vital, demonstrating that the state is not (and has never been) an independent arbiter of development, working with customary land groups and investors. Rather, it actively facilitates capitalist economic development with and on behalf of investors and development partners. In order to do this, the state appropriates kastom by incorporating the language of kastom and appearing to include customary structures and systems in its processes. Consequently, the land identification process, although facilitated and controlled by the state, appropriates kastom to legitimize it. Words such as "chiefs," "tribes," and "clans," are deployed as though they describe something that exists. In reality, they create social entities, rather than being used to describe what exists in society.

Land groups in Solomon Islands in particular, and Melanesian more generally, will continue to be dynamic and fluid. Governments are pushing for land registration, because it is seen as necessary in order to access land for economic development. But the process could also lead to exclusions, marginalization, and creation of landlessness and poverty. Land issues will continue to be important in Solomon Islands, as well as other Pacific Island countries.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to Hilda Ki'i, Stewart Firth, Terence Wesley-Smith, and Murray Chapman, who commented on an earlier draft of this paper. However, I am the sole author, and I take responsibility for any errors or misrepresentations.

NOTES

1. Many Are'are speakers of Marau Sound are the descendants of people who migrated from Are'are on Malaita hundreds of years ago. They have a patrilineal system of lineage.

2. The word *vunguvungu* maybe translated into the English word "fruits" or into "bunches of fruits." This could mean that the smaller groups, some of which became land groups, were actually the fruits of the puku.

3. The twenty-seven tribes or land groups initially identified were Kochiabolo, Koenihao, Uluna, Bulahe, Chavuchavu, Sudungana/Vatubina, Garo Buhu, Soto, Lango, Charana, Sarahi,

Kaokao, Gaegae, Sunakomu, Salasivo, Halisia, Rausere, Kaipalipali, Sabaha, Barahau, Soroboilo, Kohana, Sutahuri, Vuralingi, Chacha, Riva, and Roha.

REFERENCES

Allan, Colin H.
1957 Customary land tenure in the British Solomon Islands protectorate. Report of the Special Lands Commission. Published by Command of His Excellency the High Commission for the Western Pacific.

Banner, Stuart
2005 Preparing to be colonized: Land tenure and legal strategy in nineteenth-century Hawaii. *Law & Society Review* 39 (2): 273–314.

Bathgate, Murray
1993 *Fight for the dollar: Economic and social change in Western Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands*. Solomon Islands Report, Monograph No. 1. Wellington, New Zealand: Alexander Enterprise.

Chand, Satish, and Ron Duncan
2013 Resolving property issues as a precondition for growth: Access to land in the Pacific Islands. In *The governance of common property in the Pacific region,* ed. Peter Larmour, 33–46. Canberra: ANU Press.

Chinen, Jon J.
1958 *The Great Mahele: Hawaii's land division of 1848*. Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press.

Crocombe, Ron G.
1983 Land tenure and agriculture development in the Pacific. Extension Bulletin No. 187. Taipei, Taiwan: ASPAC Food and Fertiliser Technology Centre.

Durutalo, Simione
1985 Internal colonialism and unequal development: The case of western Viti Levu. MA thesis, Univ. of the South Pacific.

Durutalo, Simione
1986 *The paramountcy of Fijian interest and the politicization of ethnicity*. Suva: USP Sociology Society, Univ. of the South Pacific.

Evans, Daniel
2010 Tensions at the Gold Ridge mine, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands. *Pacific Economic Bulletin* 24 (3): 121–34.

Fingleton, Jim
2004 Is Papua New Guinea viable without customary groups? *Economic Bulletin* 19 (2): 96–103
2005 *Privatising land in the Pacific: A defence of customary tenures*. Discussion Paper Number 80, June. Canberra: The Australia Inst.

Foukona, Joseph, and Jaap Timmer
2016 The culture of agreement making in Solomon Islands. *Oceania* 86 (2): 116–31.

France, Peter
1969 *The charter of the land: Custom and colonization in Fiji*. London: Oxford Univ. Press.

Golub, Alex
2007a From agency to agents: Forging landowner identities in Porgera. In *Customary land tenure and registration in Australia and Papua New Guinea: Anthropological perspectives,* ed. James F. Weiner and Katie Glaskin, 73–96. Canberra: Australian National Univ. Press.
2007b Ironies of organization: Landowners, land registration, and Papua New Guinea's mining and petroleum industry. *Human Organization* 66 (1): 38–48.

Gosarevski, S., Helen Hughes, and Susan Windybank
2004 Is Papua New Guinea viable with customary land ownership? *Pacific Economic Bulletin* 19 (13): 133–36.

GRLM and GRCLA
1996 Subsidiary agreement: An agreement between Gold Ridge Mining Limited (GRML) and Gold Ridge Community and Landowners Association (GRCLA), Honiara, Solomon Islands.

Hogbin, Ian H.
1938 Social advancement in Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands. *Oceania* 8 (3): 289–305.
1961 *A Guadalcanal society: The Kaoka speakers*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Houenipwela, Rick
2017 Speech to the Provincial Premiers' Summit, Auki, Malaita Province, November 26, 2017.

Hughes, H.
2003 *Aid has failed the Pacific*. Issues Analysis No. 33. Sydney: Center for Independent Studies.

Hviding, Edvard
1993 Indigenous essentialism? 'Simplifying' customary land ownership in New Georgia, Solomon Islands. *Bijdragen to de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 149: 802–24.
1996 *Guardians of the Marovo Lagoon: Practice, place and politics in maritime Melanesia*. Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press.
2003 Disentangling the butubutu of New Georgia: Cognatic kinship in thought and action. In Oceanic societies and cultural forms: Ethnographies of experience, ed. Ingjerd Hoem and Sidsel Roalkvam, 71–113. Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Iati, Iati
2016 The implications of applying the torrens system to Samoan customary lands: Alienation through the LTRA 2008. *Journal of South Pacific Law* Issue 1: 66–88.

Jorgensen, Dan
2007 Clan-finding, clan-making and the politics of identity in a Papua New Guinea mining project. In *Customary land tenure and registration in Australia and Papua New Guinea: Anthropological perspectives,* ed. James F. Weiner and Katie Glaskin, 57–72. Canberra: Australian National Univ. Press.

Kame'eleihiwa, Liliokala
1992 *Native land foreign desires: Pehea la e pono ai?* Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press.

Kruse, Line-Noue Memea
2018 *The Pacific insular case of American Samoa: Land rights and law in unincorporated US territories*. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kurer, Oskar
2005 Land and politics in Fiji: Of failed land reforms and coups. *Journal of Pacific History* 40 (2): 299–315.

Larmour, Peter
1986 *Customary land registration in PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu*. Land Studies Occasional Paper 86/4. Port Moresby: Univ. of Papua New Guinea.
2002 Policy transfer and reversal: Customary land registration from Africa to Melanesia. *Public Administration and Development* 22: 151–61.

Maetala, Ruth
2008 Matrilineal land tenure systems in Solomon Islands: The cases of Guadalcanal, Makira and Isabel provinces. In *Land and women: The matrilineal factor: The cases of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu,* ed. Elise Huffer, 35–72. Suva: Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

McDougall, Debra
2016 *Engaging with strangers: Love and violence in rural Solomon Islands*. New York: Berghahn Books.

Monson, Rebecca
2011 Negotiating land tenure: Women, men and the transformation of land tenure in Solomon Islands. Working Papers No. 1. International Development Law Organization. Leiden, Netherlands: Leiden University.

Moore, Clive
2013 *Solomon Islands historical encyclopedia 1893–1978*. Brisbane: University of Queensland. http://www.solomonencyclopaedia.net/index.html.

Namosuaia, Daniel
2015 Multi-million Tina Hydro Project at stake. *Island Sun* July 28, 2015, accessed March 25, 2017. http://theislandsun.com/multi-million-tina-hydro-project-at-stake/.

Nanau, Gordon L.
2009 Can a theory of insecure globalisation provide better explanations for instability in the South Pacific? The case of Solomon Islands. PhD thesis, Univ. of East Anglia, Norwich.
2014 Local experiences with mining royalties, company and the state in the Solomon Islands. *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 138 (année 2014-1): 77–92.

Ogan, Eugene
1971 Nasioi land tenure: An extended case study. *Oceania* XLII (2): 81–93.

Osorio, Jonathan K. K.
2002 *Dismembering Lahui: A history of the Hawaiian nation to 1887*. Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press.

Radio New Zealand
2017 *Solomon Islands govt. reinstates Gold Ridge mining lease*. Radio New Zealand January 24, 2017, accessed February 20, 2017. http://www.radionz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/322996/solomon-islands-govt-reinstates-gold-ridge-mining-lease.

Richardson, Craig
2006 Learning from failure: Property rights, land reforms, and the hidden architecture of capitalism. *American Enterprise Inst. for Public Policy Research* No. 2: 4.

Rivers, W. H. R.
1914 *The history of the Melanesian Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Rokolekutu, Ponipat
2017 Interrogating the Vanua and the institutional trusteeship role of the ILTB: Understanding the economic marginalization of iTaukei. PhD diss., Univ. of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

Scott, J.
1998 *Seeing like a state: How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press.

Slatter, Claire
2004 The political economy of restructuring the Pacific with a case study of Fiji. PhD thesis, Massey Univ., Albany Campus, Auckland.

Sogavare, Manasseh
2015 The case for land reform in Solomon Islands. Speech by the Prime Minister, Hon. Masseh Sogavare on the occasion of the opening of the workshop on Land Reform

on the theme, "Building a Pathway for a Successful Land Reform in Solomon Islands," 26–27. Honiara, Solomon Island: Forum Fisheries Agency.

Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation News
2018 Gold Ridge mine on track to restart. SIBC News March 8, 2018, accessed March 12, 2018. http://www.sibconline.com.sb/gold-ridge-mine-on-track-to-restart/.

Solomon Islands Government
1995 Sabaha Tribe, minutes of meeting, July 25, 1995. Solomon Islands Government, Ministry of Lands, Housing & Survey, File Lot 4 of LR998, Koku Land.
2016 National minerals policy. Honiara, Solomon Island: Ministry of Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification.
2017 *Tina Hydropower Development Project: Land acquisition and livelihood restoration plan*. Honiara, Solomon Island: Ministry of Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification.

Solomon Star
June 30, 2017 Aust-SI new partnership deal. *Solomon Star,* accessed July 10, 2017. https://www.solomonstarnews.com/news/national/13091-aust-si-new-partnership-deal.

Stead, Victoria C.
2016 *Becoming landowners: Entanglements of custom and modernity in Papua New Guinea and Timor-Lester*. Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press.

Stege, Kristina E., Ruth Maetala, Anna Naupa, and Joel Simo, with Elise Huffer, ed.
2008 *Land and women: The matrilineal factor: The cases of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu*. Suva: Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. Tina River Hydro Development Project, accessed March 19, 2017. http://www.tina-hydro.com/6666/energy-minister-hands-over-2-7-million-dollars-to-tina-river-landowners/.

Van Dyke, Jon M.
2008 *Who owns the crown lands of Hawaii?* Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press.

Ward, Gerard R.
2013 Changing forms of communal tenure. In *The governance of common property in the Pacific region,* ed. Peter Larmour, 19–32. Canberra: ANU Press.

Woodford, Charles M.
1890 *A naturalist among the head-hunters: Being an account of three visits to the Solomon Islands in the years 1886, 1887 and 1888*. 2nd ed. London: George Philip and Son.

World Bank
2019 Crucial final agreements signed as Tina River Hydropower Project moves closer to construction in Solomon Islands. Press Release, September 27, 2019. https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2019/09/27/crucial-final-agreements-signed-as-tina-river-hydropower-project-moves-closer-to-construction-in-solomon-islands (accessed November 23, 2019).